

RHYTHMS OF THE SOCIAL LIFE

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succession of wet and dry seasons.¹ In March, after 221
four months without rain, the fields are burned; the
pastures are sere. There has been no work to do in the
fields. The dust and the drought, and the inactivity,
impose a mood of depression upon the people, which [796]*
culminates in the taboos of Holy Week. In spring, [784]
with the first rains, the hills are suddenly clothed
with green and the air is soft and wet. As the face of
the town changes, so are men's countenances reani-
mated. Work begins in the *milpas*; the fruit trees
commence to bear again; life is on the rise.

This year-long cadence is broken into minor periods 796*
by the occurrence of the many festivals. Benefiting 527
by two traditions characterized by many calendric
festivals—the elaborate ceremonial calendar of the
Indians and the many saints' days of South European
Catholicism—the Mexican folk enjoy a great number
of festivals which are in part worship but in greater
part play. On probably one-third of all the days of
the year somewhere in the valley of Tepoztlán there is
going on traditional calendric ritual, although on
many of these days it may be no more than the play-
ing of the *chirimía* on the roof of some chapel.

Certain of these festivals, now of course entirely de- 796*
termined by the dates of the Christian calendar, are
the most important events of the year to the average
Tepoztécán. In the anticipation of and preparation

¹ An attempt is made in the following chapter to give an account of this annual cycle, at once astronomical, economic, and ritual, as well as a matter of public mood.

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* 796 for these *fiestas*, and in the realization of the anticipated day, the people experience that tension and release, that holding-on and then letting-go, which seems to be everywhere a need of human nature. For many
 • [527] weeks in advance of the carnival it is a chief subject of discussion, and long and elaborate plans are made for it. In the case of the religious festivals, the collection of the necessary money, the building of the fireworks tower, the training of the dancers, the making of the wax candles and the wax-flower decorations, the preparation of the festal dishes—all build up the tension which is to have such pleasurable release.

* 796 A distinction is sometimes made between ceremonial occasions which are characterized by restrictions
 786 on ordinary conduct and those which are characterized
 • [784] by unusual and pleasurable relaxations from usual restrictions: days of Saturnalia and days of taboo, holidays and holy days. In both cases satisfaction appears to be realized from the alternation of tension and release of tension. From this point of view it may perhaps be said that the calendric festivals of Tepoztlán are, with two exceptions, of the Saturnalia type. In the case of all the festivals celebrating *santos*, the day is on the whole one of pleasure, of wearing good clothes and eating good food, of dancing or watching religious dancing, of drink and of song; and this is even more obvious in the cases of the two most
 [527] important secular *fiestas*—the carnival and the *Al-tepe-ilhuil*. The important taboo days are those im-

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ported by the Spanish priests;² the last three days of Lent, when work is not done, water and wood are not hauled. (Here, as elsewhere, the taboos of the Lenten period are broken ceremonially by a lesser carnival, by getting drunk, and—historically characteristic—by eating meat *tamales*.) The vigils observed during the nights of All Saints' and All the Dead (October 31 and November 1) are also occasions of repression, of taboo, rather than of license. The nights are spent in praying, in calling aloud the names of the departed, in waiting, in apprehension of the nearness of the dead—in a repression of the impulses of play.³ These are uncanny hours, like the last hours of Lent; and uncanniness is the very antithesis of Saturnalia.

All the other days of special observation are days of relaxation, and even the most important commemorative occasions of the church are, in large measure, play. Although the Tepoztecs customarily refer to their holidays in two categories—sacred and secular *fiestas*—the distinction they make is one between those holidays which celebrate a *santo* and those which do not. A great part of the *santo fiestas* is merely fun, and in the widest sense one of the two principal secular *fiestas* has a religious element. The carnival, on the

² The Aztecs had taboo days in their *nemontemi*, the five days that rounded out the calendrical year.

³ It may be observed that among the lower middle class in Mexican cities—and elsewhere—the Day of the Dead is celebrated by taking food and drink to the graveyards and there enjoying a picnic. The final stage in this secularization and "saturnalization" of this ancient taboo day is to be found in modern Halloween—a children's carnival.

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